

GERALD FIGAL



Monstrous Media and Delusional Consumption in Kon Satoshi's *Paranoia Agent*

THE OTAKU MANQUÉ

Kon Satoshi's 2004 thirteen-episode TV anime series *Mōsō dairinin*¹ (translated as *Paranoia Agent*, although *mōsō* is more akin to "delusion") presents a twist on the usual Tokyo-destroying monster. The monster that lays waste to the city springs not from an atomic mutation or alien planet or from a supernatural realm or robots run amok but apparently from the stressed-out psyches of the people themselves: when feeling cornered and under pressure, a mysterious inline-skating, bat-wielding boy (dubbed "Shōnen Batto," literally "Bat Boy" but translated in the English version as "L'il Slugger") appears and whacks them, sometimes fatally, thus releasing them from their anxieties. As the series progresses, Shōnen Batto transforms into an increasingly monstrous shape, first through rumors and media hype and then in "reality" by feeding on people's anxieties and desires for escape. By the climax of the story, he is an amorphous black ooze flooding violently through the urban landscape, absorbing everyone. While the origin of Shōnen Batto is revealed to have been a young girl's inability to take responsibility for her actions out of embarrassment and fear of punishment, the social conditions under

which her present actions trigger Shōnen Batto's assaults and metamorphosis point to the monster as something beyond a mere mass-psychological projection of stress made manifest. Media itself attains monstrous proportions, feeding and fed by a hollow hyperconsumerism, a consumerism for the sake of consuming.

I'd like to read *Paranoia Agent* as working through the unexpected and monstrous transformations that mass-mediated consumer capitalism effects on social relations and individual agency, turning consumers into what we might call *otaku manqué*—obsessive “fans” of media products without the attendant specialized knowledge of them or active engagement in them. In this context, the “fans” are all those who passively participate in and sustain this consumption, not the archetypal otaku, although the figure of the otaku occupies a key position in the critique I think Kon is offering as overseer of the series (the thirteen episodes have several different directors). Here the classic otaku figure becomes the active, overt, and concentrated instance of the passive “soft fandom” that progressively congeals, hardens, and materializes among the Tokyoites depicted in the series. In their hypermediated daily lives and in their mania over a media consumable, they become unwitting and incomplete otaku without even knowing it. Not that being a complete otaku fares much better. This vision of a kind of otakuization of society through media and consumption differs from the usual emphasis on the obsessive otaku inhabiting semiautonomous “islands in space” carved out by self-consciously attained media-based knowledge of specialized subjects.² Rather, these consumer-fans, by dint of their unreflective and generalized but no less obsessive—in a word, delusional—relationship to media and media consumables, drown in an undifferentiated mass (culture).

For this analysis, Marshall McLuhan's famous but often misunderstood dictum “the medium is the message” provides a useful springboard. For McLuhan, a “medium” is “any extension of ourselves” (a tool, a technology, a system of signs). A “message” comprises the often-unnoticed structural changes (of “scale” or “pace” or “pattern”) that a new innovation brings into society.³ In *Paranoia Agent*, the medium is the monster, where the medium comprises the electronic media technologies that have become part and parcel of mass—I would say mass-delusional—consumption. The monster—the structural transformation or, in this instance, structural deformation—lies in the figure of comfort-providing character goods: the soft plush toy, the childish accessory, the cute “superdeformed” anime figure. The overtly monstrous figure of Shōnen Batto is wedded to the covertly monstrous figure of Maromi, the “sleepy-eyed dog” character at the psychic heart of the series.

Both absorb virtually all the public's attention to become potential objects of otaku knowledge and desire that remain unfulfilled. This relationship between the threatening Shōnen Batto and the *kawaii* Maromi comes across in one promotional still for the series where the former appears as a shadow on the latter. The real threat is thus not the personal anxiety that conjures up Shōnen Batto but rather what might be called the social narcolepsy and narcissism that media-driven mass consumerism produces in contemporary Japan, according to the critique Kon seems to be staging (ironically) in this anime. In this respect, Kon's commentary bears relation to Murakami Takashi's Superflat project, which he styles as a "Monster Manifesto" (*kaibutsu sengen*) for the "deformed monsters" that are postwar Japanese and their popular art. Murakami, however, embraces this "art, the work of monsters," and its iconic figure, the otaku, while Kon displays their self-destructive logic.⁴ If otaku are viewed (positively or negatively) as social monsters living on islands of self-absorption apart from society, consumers as otaku manqué are social monsters living on islands of self-absorption within society, which comes across in *Paranoia Agent* as a much more dangerous threat.

TAKE A REST

For the heart of Kon's critique, we must dive first into episode 10, "Maromi Madoromi" (officially translated as "Mellow Maromi" where "madoromi" suggests "dozing off"). The most self-reflexive of the series, this episode concerns the production of an anime series, called *Maromi Madoromi* and based on the hit character Maromi, created by character designer Sagi Tsukiko. We later learn that as a twelve-year-old Sagi accidentally let her puppy, also named Maromi, get hit by a car when she doubled over—apparently from her first menstrual cramps—and lost hold of the puppy's leash.⁵ She is the first victim of Shōnen Batto, whom we also later learn she fabricated at the time of the puppy incident to cast herself as victim, thus excusing herself from the real explanation for the accident. (Following the series' motif of naming characters in relation to various animals, her name "Sagi" is a homonym for a type of heron but also for the word for "fraud" or "deception.") By the end of the "Mellow Maromi" episode the entire production crew, under stress to make a deadline exacerbated by a bungling production manager, one-by-one falls fatal victim to Shōnen Batto. The commentary on the notoriously difficult work conditions of TV anime is clear, but my attention is drawn to the identification of Maromi as monster, which begins explicitly from this episode

and subsequently leads to a string of connections and revelations that propel the story through its climax and denouement during the final three episodes. That this occurs in an anime in production within an anime throws into relief the issue of the anime medium itself and its complicity in the production and dissemination of the soporific effect of character goods like Maromi and the delusional (*mōsō*) consumerism for which it is a representative, an agent (*dairinin*).

Episode 10 opens with what immediately strikes the viewer as a low-budget TV anime done in a simple, flat, cute style coded as “kids’ cartoon” that is very different from the more sophisticated look of the rest of the series. The camera pans down from a blue-yellow sky through the horizon of a suburban neighborhood, cutting to a pair of small feet in baseball cleats and socks stepping along with a noonday shadow conspicuously cast as a fluctuating black ellipsis below. We then look down, as if from the roof of a three- or four-story building, at a little leaguer in his ball uniform, walking spiritlessly through town with a bat on his shoulder. A cut a few seconds later of the boy’s upper torso is timed with his heavy sigh, at which point the camera shifts on cue to eye level for a medium shot of the boy passing a toy store that has a bin full of stuffed animals for sale on the sidewalk. In one window, a robot and Godzilla-like monster hover over his head (Figure 1). Just as he exits the frame, a Maromi doll comes alive from the bin of stuffed animals to follow the boy to a riverbank, where, in frustration, the boy has flashbacks of striking out in a game and berates himself, exclaiming “I’m a nothing” (*dōse boku nan ka . . .*). Just as he is about to heave his bat into the river, Maromi pokes him from behind, startling the boy, who drops the bat that then rolls into the river. This action sends the scene for a few seconds into the sketches on which the completed scene was based. This sudden shift to an even more primitive state of the animation works well to convey the boy’s surprise—it is as if the color is knocked out of him as the background is pulled away, isolating the emotion on the isolated characters. But it also works to underscore the self-reflexive nature of this episode.

This play between the completed animation and the sketches continues during Maromi’s attempts to cheer up the boy by assuring him that he isn’t worthless; instead, he is only “tired” and should simply “take a rest.” As Maromi repeats several times the hypnotic mantra “*yasuminayō*” (“take a rest”), the details of the sketches degrade further and then the camera zooms out to reveal that we have been watching the production of the cartoon on a monitor in an anime studio (Figure 2).

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FIGURE 1. Anime within anime: scene from episode 1 of the TV series *Maromi Madoromi* in episode 10—"Maromi Madoromi" ("Mellow Maromi")—of the TV series *Paranoia Agent*.

sequence is the soundtrack. The music is the end theme of the series itself, "White Hill: Maromi's Theme," which normally plays through the credits of each episode while the camera pans around images of the main characters in a death-like sleep in a circle around a huge plush toy—Maromi—that appears as the camera zooms out. Played during the opening of episode 10, it invokes the drowsiness that Maromi induces and presides over. Indeed, the scene ends with Maromi easing the boy's frustrations and disappointment not by suggesting he practice harder but rather by coaxing him to take a rest, to escape waking reality through sleep. Maromi's function here, as it is throughout the series, is that of a narcotic that relieves stress by encouraging the avoidance of the hard work of adult reality and by providing excuses to evade responsibility. In this episode, the blundering staff production manager Saruta ("Monkey")—nothing but a bundle of excuses—is frequently framed by images of Maromi in the form of promotional posters and various character goods. At one point, echoing the opening sequence's shift to sketches, he begins to dissolve into an anime sketch of himself as he verbally denies responsibility for foul-ups that have plagued the production of *Mellow Maromi*. In other words, his escape from responsibility is paralleled by a fall from his "real" anime world into a second-degree, cartoon-sketch world. In both instances, the anime within the anime is associated with escape from

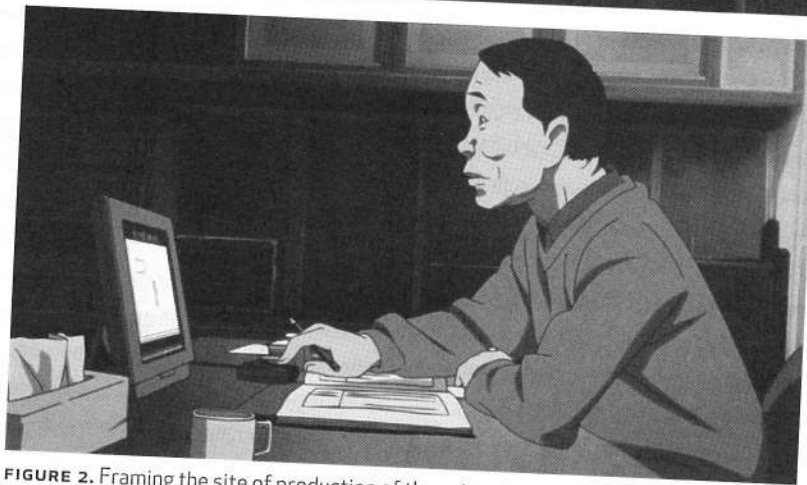
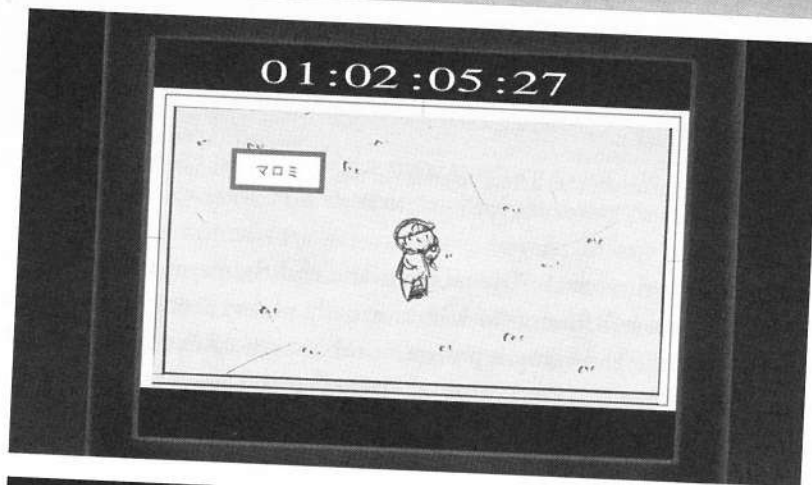


FIGURE 2. Framing the site of production of the anime within the anime. From *Paranoia Agent*, episode 10, "Maromi Madoromi."

the burdens of reality facilitated by the “sleepy-eyed” Maromi, itself a narcotic in all its manifestations: plush toy, hallucination, anime. The analogy to our (real human) relationship to the consumption of “first-order” anime is apparent.

The second thing of note in the opening sequence is the suggestion that Maromi and Shōnen Batto are connected. It is no coincidence that the little leaguer, a kind of superdeformed anime version of Shōnen Batto himself, calls Maromi a *bakemono* (monster). The same language is applied to Shōnen Batto in the following episodes, wherein the identification of Maromi with Shōnen Batto is made explicit. One might also read the “M” on the boy’s ball cap as signifying Maromi, covering—and controlling—the head of the boy.

The rest of this episode is about the making of this inaugural episode of *Mellow Maromi*, interspersed with several nondiagetic insets hosted by a mini-Maromi who teaches us about the various staff roles as staff members are successively knocked off by Shōnen Batto. Unlike earlier attacks, however, the crewmembers are never shown actually being assaulted by Shōnen Batto. Each is simply shown with his or her head in pool of blood. What we do see is the ubiquitous image of Maromi (“The Healer Dog” as the promotional posters say) dominating the office space and Saruta burying his head into his Maromi *dakimakura* (huggable pillow) in a posture similar to his colleagues who have been whacked at their desks. In other words, Maromi—not the phantom Shōnen Batto—is what killed them.

Episode 10 ends on an explicit staging of the issue of representation through media such as anime. After most of the staff is dead, the enraged and panicked Saruta kills the series production manager in the manner of Shōnen Batto and then gets whacked himself, apparently by Shōnen Batto, who, in time-shifted scenes that have been interleaved throughout the main narrative, has been pursuing Saruta’s car as Saruta desperately tries—and fails—to deliver the *Mellow Maromi* tape to the studio on time. The all-important tape, however, survives. In an overhead shot in the night rain, we see Saruta splayed out on his back, (consuming) eyes and (consuming) mouth wide open and blood pooling around his head, hand still grasping the videotaped episode 1 of *Mellow Maromi*. A worried male voice out of the frame asks: “Is it OK?”—“Yes, it’s okay!” replies a frantic female voice as the camera zooms in on the tape

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that the woman takes from Saruta's dead hand. The tape is labeled in Japanese *Maromi Madoromi #1*, but it also has a number "10" on it, self-referencing episode 10 of *Paranoia Agent* that we are watching. As we watch the tape taken from Saruta's hand, the dialogue between the boy and Maromi from the opening of the episode continues before we cut to the two of them in the completed cartoon scene that was in the sketches of the opening:

BOY: "I have no talents" (*Boku ni wa sainō ga nai n da*)

MAROMI: "That's not true! I think you're just tired. Yeah, that's it! You should take a rest. OK?" (*Sonna koto nai yo. Kitto kimi ga tsukarete irun da yo. Kitto sō da yo. Yasunda hō ga ii yo. Ne?*)

Maromi then begins the same soporific chant, "Take a rest, take a rest, take a rest . . ." while climbing around the body and over the head of the boy. After the fourth iteration the camera zooms out as in the opening sequence, but this time to reveal the scene running on a laptop next to a Maromi *dakimakura* in a darkened workroom without workers—two desks have vases with a cut flower, apparently commemorating the deaths of their previous occupants. There's a quick cut to a box overflowing with extra Maromi pillows and then a close-up of a half-filled Maromi coffee cup between a pencil and part of an instruction sheet of scene retakes for *Maromi Madoromi #1* dated 19 April 2004, the original airdate for this episode of *Paranoia Agent*. All the while Maromi is chanting "*yasuminayō, yasuminayō, yasuminayō . . .*" The camera then moves to a ceiling position over the workroom before the scene suddenly switches off like a traditional CRT screen, nesting yet another visual frame of reference in a fashion that has become a trademark in Kon Satoshi's work (Figure 3).

This switch-off of the screen at the end of this episode—a simulation of our own switching off of the television or perhaps of a surveillance camera mounted on a wall near the ceiling of the workroom—makes all the difference in this repetition of the opening sequence. Whereas the zoom out in the opening places us in the site of production (the studio), the switch-off calls attention to the viewer-consumer/fan and the site of consumption (wherever we are watching this) and could be interpreted as a call to take a rest from anime (and consumption) itself—just turn it off because Mellow Maromi and its narcotic effect are dangerous. This paradoxical critique of anime within an anime is reinforced by the usual end theme and image immediately following. The multiple screens and framing in this episode emphasize that we live (and die) through layers of media and mediation that are complicit with networks

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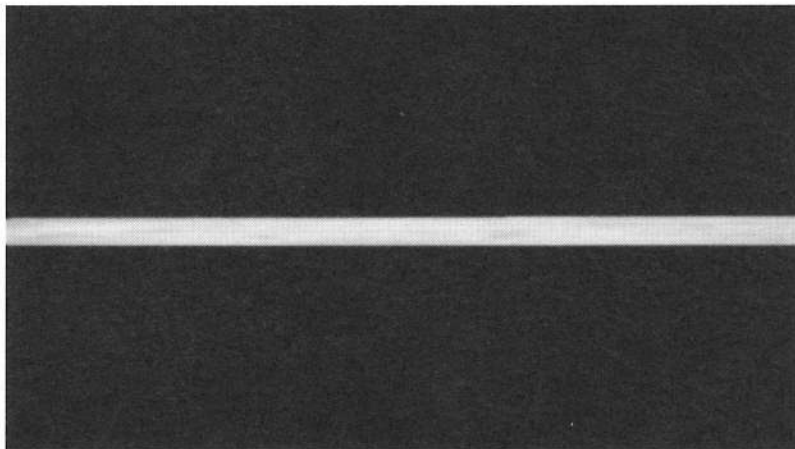
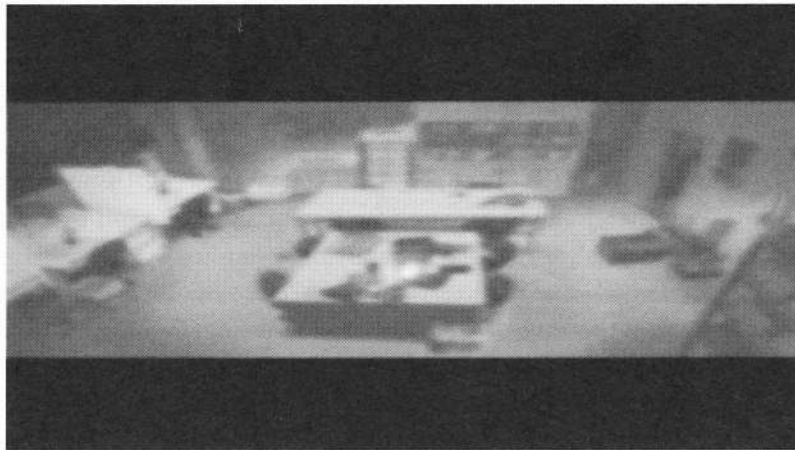


FIGURE 3. Framing the site of consumption and the fan's gaze. From episode 10, "Maromi Madoromi."

of consumption. The commentary that Kon develops crystallizes in the media figure of Maromi as monster, associated and on par with Shōnen Batto.

ALL-CONSUMING MEDIA

This identification of Maromi as a monster in league with Shōnen Batto is furthered in the next episode, "No Entry" (*"Shin'nyū kinshi"*), which begins with a TV program promoting the *Mellow Maromi* anime series, followed by rumors that Shōnen Batto has transformed, in the words of one character, into a true *bakemono*. In response to this anxiety, the entire population—save for a couple clear-headed observers—turns to the escapist comfort Maromi brings. As a result, by the following episode, Maromi has quickly saturated the media, markets, and minds of Tokyo, creating a fanaticism that is displayed in a series of quick cuts of TV reports, with us in the position of viewers of the various TV screens. One such scene is outside a record store where fans of the *Mellow Maromi* TV show, adorned with Maromi character-goods, are queued up to buy the CD of the series' hit song "Oyasumi" ("Goodnight"). In another, a mother, holding her son who is sporting a Maromi t-shirt and holding a Maromi plush toy, explains to the interviewer that "It's his favorite, our house has become full of Maromi . . ." The composition, movement, and lines of sight in this four-second scene are revealing (Figure 4). The dark, disembodied microphone in the interviewer's hand anchors the center of the shot while the mother's opening and closing mouth moves into the frame as the camera pans up slowly at a slight angle from lower left to upper right. Besides the slow pan, her mouth is the only movement in the scene and is visually as well as functionally linked to the microphone. The scene cuts to the next news clip just before the pan reaches her eyes, reducing her to a moving mouth that seems eager to consume the microphone, the metonymy for the media in this scene. The eyes that we do see are those of her son, staring past the microphone and, we presume, up at the interviewer. At the same time, mouthless Maromi's oversized eyes are fixed squarely—and unnervingly—on the viewer, who is in a position not quite aligned with that of the interviewer. Their size and shape tie in visually with the microphone, underscoring the relationship already established between the media, Maromi as metaphor for consumption gone mad, the consumer-fans of Maromi, and we viewers as consumer-fans of this anime. It is a relationship of mutually reinforcing complicity that defines a world of media-driven consumer capitalism that, short of total catastrophic breakdown, appears difficult to extricate

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FIGURE 4. The birth of a fan among mother, media, and character goods. From *Paranoia Agent*, episode 11, “Shinnyō Kinshi” (“No Entry”).

oneself from once ensnared. The boy in this scene, literally wedged between the nurturing and overindulgent mother and his other object of comfort and desire, Maromi, is depicted as bewildered at the formative moment of entering this world as a full-fledged “citizen,” born, if you will, between the mother and Maromi. Lost is the innocence of the favorite bedtime cuddle friend once that same figure transforms into a media monster and is experienced as such, worn as a t-shirt over the heart of the child whose mother is unwittingly and yet willingly giving him over to this world.

This rapid series of news clips occurs just as the identification of Maromi with Shōnen Batto is made explicit when the wife of Chief Detective Ikari—who was investigating the series of assaults, until forced to quit—tells her husband’s partner, Detective Maniwa, about her confrontation with Shōnen Batto. In that conversation, Ikari’s sickly wife explains that she was able to stand down the monstrous Shōnen Batto by telling him that: “he was the same as that sleepy-eyed dog.” We learn through Maniwa’s sleuthing that ten years ago, at the moment of entering pubescence, Tsukiko made up a story of a bat-wielding assailant to mask that her momentary inattention led to her puppy Maromi being killed. She has essentially recreated that childhood incident in an adult context when under job-related stress. When Detective Maniwa, in the persona of “Radar Man,” calls Tsukiko and confronts her

with this truth, monsters of the past and present appear. Visibly disturbed, Tsukiko is “saved” from the trauma of the news by her Maromi doll, who cuts the telephone line and tells her not to think. But it is too late—the demon-like Shōnen Batto beats down the door and chases her. Just as he is about to strike her with his golden bat, Maniwa intervenes and transforms into a caped superhero with a magical sword to stave off the monster long enough for Maromi to lead Tsukiko through a pink (i.e., Maromi-colored) door floating in isolation in the middle of the room.

The door that Maromi takes Tsukiko through leads to an imaginary nostalgic Japan made of two-dimensional (superflat) paper cutouts, where the now down-and-out Ikari, having picked up a Maromi key fob, has been tempted to find solace. This is a place, says one of the cutout characters, where “Shōnen Batto never comes.” At the beginning of the final episode—called “The Final Episode” (“*Saishūkai*”)—Tsukiko and Maromi meet him there, again with the drowsy “Maromi’s Theme” playing in the background (Figure 5).

In the meantime, in the real world, the sudden disappearance of Maromi items creates a panic as people are swept up by a black ooze now destroying Tokyo and Japan at large. The Shōnen Batto-turned-black-ooze physically and metaphorically envelopes and consumes media and consumers. Frustrated shoppers scream “We want Maromi”; pedestrians and train passengers are passively absorbed in their cell phones (a ubiquitous media device throughout the entire series); news media is a talking head in mid-broadcast; and—to drive the point home—a gangster changes the channel on the television set—where the medium literally spews forth the monster (Figure 6).

Tellingly, the first victim of the black ooze shown, in a scene near the end of the previous episode, is actually a cartoon doll-obsessed otaku, which enacts the narcissism at the core of the media-consumerism nexus Kon explores. The otaku has just completed his masterpiece: a toy figure of himself wearing a Maromi t-shirt. When he looks down at himself, however, he is shocked to see that the Maromi logo of his real t-shirt has transformed into what looks like a representation of his own bare chest. At that moment, the Maromi logo on the doll turns black, prefiguring the onslaught of the black ooze. In a panic, he stumbles onto the street where he is promptly struck with a wave of black ooze. The sequence brilliantly suggests the negative self-absorption that that shallow consumer culture can create (Figure 7).

When Maniwa radios Chief Ikari with his theory of the Maromi-Shōnen Batto connection, he appears to Ikari on a black-and-white TV screen in the nostalgic cutout world where Ikari and Tsukiko are still willingly trapped. He explains that emotional dependence on Maromi allowed the monstrous

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FIGURE 5. The flatness of the nostalgic past. From *Paranoia Agent*, episode 13, “Saishūkai” (“Final Episode”).

growth of Shōnen Batto and that only Tsukiko can put an end to the catastrophe. Ikari, rejecting Maniwa’s plea to send Tsukiko back, destroys the TV set to spare his and Tsukiko’s conscience of Shōnen Batto and the pain of the real world. The cutout people rejoice and Ikari is almost convinced to escape permanently in this imaginary world, until his ill wife (who has always been weak and just had a heart attack) appears there to remind him of their mutual devotion and the value of accepting the real world while working through its trials and tribulations together. With the memory of his words to her at a time of despair—“a makeshift salvation is nothing but deception”—and of the love they have shared together in life, he, when confronted with her dying, has his epiphany and, with a baseball bat, smashes the 2D set of the cutout world, thus escaping the escape. As the cutouts smash to pieces, they turn into multiple Maromi dolls. He has seen through the delusion that was society’s own collective making.

TAKE TWO

In the climax of the series, the black ooze goes berserk, chasing down Ikari and Tsukiko as they flee. A giant Maromi temporarily obstructs the ooze from

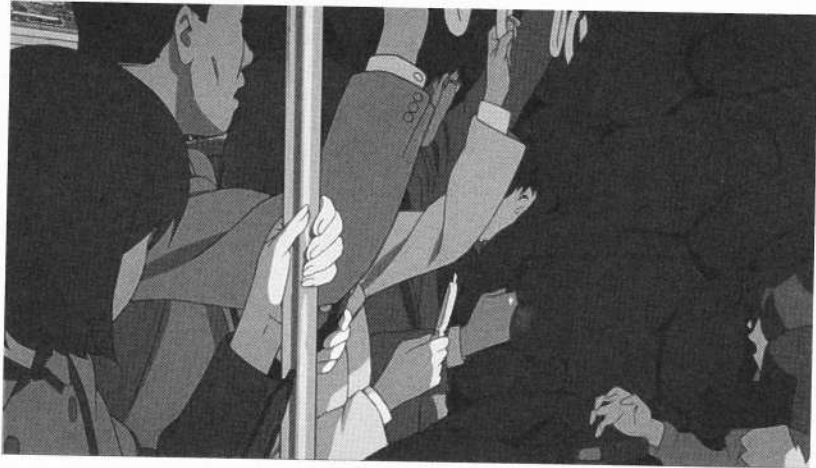


FIGURE 6. The medium is the monster. From episode 13, "Saishūkai."

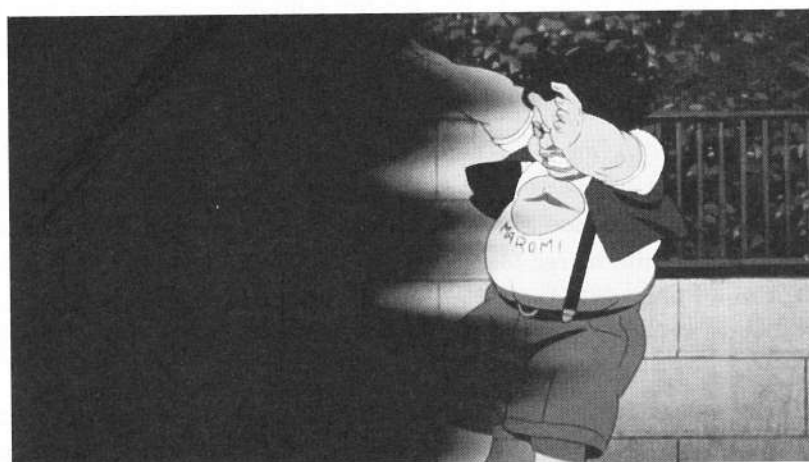
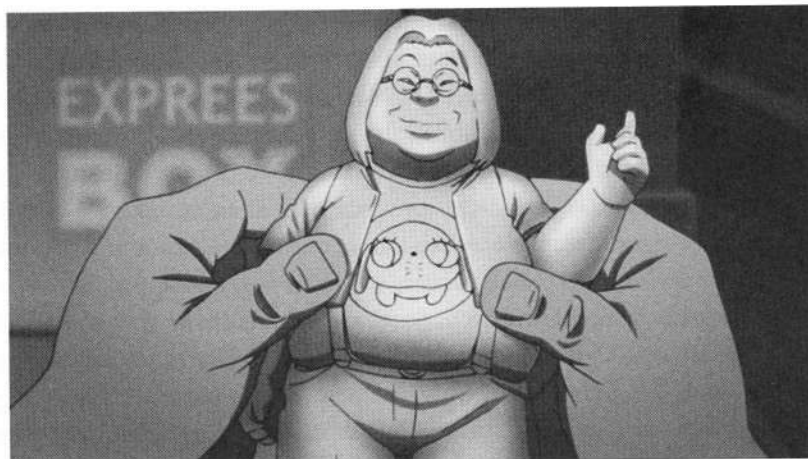


FIGURE 7. Otaku consumed as his own object of desire. From episode 13, "Saishūkai."

reaching them, but then is filled to bursting by it and completes a blending with it, thus visualizing the union of Shōnen Batto and Maromi. Not until Tsukiko gives up the lie (she drops her Maromi plush toy, which transforms into her puppy) and takes responsibility for her puppy's death through an apology while enveloped in the ooze does it stop laying waste to the city. Ikari then emerges from the wreckage and says provocatively as he surveys the damage: "This is just like right after the war," suddenly raising the issues of Japan's war responsibility and victim consciousness, as well as suggesting the role of postwar consumerism in occluding an honest recognition of the past upon which present affluence has grown. Japan's postwar rebuilding of an affluent consumer society is alluded to in the final sequence, which points to a new beginning—take two—of the same cycle we just witnessed throughout the series. A TV broadcast announces the end of a two-year reconstruction of Tokyo, followed by a repeat of the opening scene of episode 1: people on cell phones, music players plugged into their ears, faces in newspapers, and eyes closed on trains. These images are accompanied by a montage of conversation fragments expressing various excuses and complaints, including a close-up of a text message that implies an ironic critique of the medium we are watching: "What? That's an anime, right? Can't we see something more like a normal movie?"

The apparent answer is no, as this sequence cuts to an animation on a jumbo screen: a cat yawning and waking up as pedestrians pass underneath. Tsukiko, in what looks like a school uniform despite her being twenty-two years old, stops to look up at it and then continues on. We see Ikari back as a construction traffic guard and the unsavory hack journalist, Kawazu, on a cell phone trying to hawk a story as usual. Our screen fades to white and then fades into what looks like the same mysterious old man who appears throughout the series writing characters and symbols in some kind of equation on the sidewalk. As in his first such appearance, the equation ends suspended with what could be construed as katakana for "a" and "ni," perhaps to end with "me." We then see that it is not the usual old man but Detective Maniwa, whose now-white hair, widening eyes, and perspiring face show shock and fear. Then it's cut to black and "Maromi's Theme." After the end credits the white-haired Maniwa appears for the usual interepisode "Prophetic Vision" in place of the old man from previous episodes. He stands on the moon with the Earth in the background, with his final words suggesting that it is all going to begin again.

I have suggested, in a twist on Marshall McLuhan's formulation of the relationship between "the medium" and "the message," that in *Paranoia Agent* the medium is the monster. That is, mediated extensions of self—depicted

conspicuously throughout the series by ubiquitous screens, phones, character goods, and anime itself—bring about unsuspected and unnoticed (until too late) transformations in society and among individuals (McLuhan's notion of the "message"). Media- and consumption-driven relations and identities as depicted in *Paranoia Agent*, induce self-absorption, delusions, and a misrecognition and devaluation—a flattening—of "real life." By the catastrophic climax of the series, the initial threat, a bat-wielding boy on inline skates striking desperate and pressured people, has metastasized through media networks into a full-blown monster who feeds on their unreflective consumption of the media that permeates them. Media that once provided individuals with leisure, information, and social connections become the source of discomfort and disconnection, feeding in turn a desire for immediate comfort-through-escape that is made manifest in the mania for the character Maromi. Shōnen Batto as monster, and Maromi as monster, are thus in a circular complementary relationship with the consumer-fan caught in its self-perpetuating vortex. The Maromi-Shōnen Batto monster encourages "sleep" (or unconsciousness or even death), where "sleep" is a figure of disengagement from the reality of adult society and the responsibilities that it entails. The result is a narcoleptic state where one falls down or is beaten down asleep. As the ending of *Paranoia Agent* suggests, this mass-produced monster deforms self and societal development, producing and reproducing another monster that can be seen as the spawn of Shōnen Batto (monstrous media) and Maromi (delusional consumption)—a society of otaku manqué, the result of the mass production of otaku but lacking the aura of the original.

Notes

1. *Mōsō dairinin*, dir. Kon Satoshi, TV series, 13 episodes (2004); translated as *Paranoia Agent: Complete Collection*, 4-DVD box set (Geneon, 2005).
2. Miyadai Shinji, *Seifuku shōjo tachi no sentaku* (The choice of the uniformed school-girls) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1994), 231–74.
3. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1994), 7.
4. Murakami Takashi, "Superflat Trilogy: Greetings, You Are Alive," in *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*, ed. Murakami Takashi (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), 161.
5. That the onset of Tsukiko's first period is, in a sense, at the source of the problem deserves further questioning: What does it mean to have this gendered and rather charged incident—trauma—surround the original deception and genesis of Shōnen Batto? Does Tokyo deserve to be destroyed because of a girl's natural reaction to a menstrual cramp?